Interview: Kate Braid (KB)
Interviewer: Bailey Garden (BG) and Ken Bauder (KB#2)
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Transcription: Pam Moodie

BG [00:00:06] So just as an introduction, this is an interview with Kate Braid. It's November 8th, and we are here with Ken Bauder and Bailey Garden as interviewers. So, can you just to get us started, Kate? Tell us your name, as well as when and where you were born.

KB [00:00:24] My name is Kate Braid, and I was born in Calgary, Alberta, March 9th, 1947.

BG [00:00:31] Wonderful, and so, were you raised in Calgary?

KB [00:00:33] We lived in Calgary until I was ten, and then my dad got transferred to Montreal. Then I grew up in Montreal all through the teen years, and then I went away to university in New Brunswick.

KB#2 [00:00:49] Did you, did you have both languages as a family language?

KB [00:00:53] No, we were totally Anglophone. This was back in the -- it would have been '57 -- so this was in the sixties, in Montreal. So we were in Beaconsfield, you know, sort of outside Montreal. It was a complete Anglo ghetto. Nobody spoke French. I actually was in Montreal working in 1970 when the FLQ stuff happened. My boyfriend was a Francophone and was cheering in the mornings whenever they blew up another mailbox or, you know, and then the really nasty stuff started. And I understood why they were pissed off. And I also understood this wasn't my place. This -- the Francophones needed to get their own act together, and they didn't need another Anglophone. So, that's when I left.

KB#2 [00:01:49] And Expo '67.

KB [00:01:51] Yeah, I was there for that. I lived at Expo '67. That was very exciting. Yeah. That was the first time, oddly, living in Montreal, that I felt Canadian. Sort of seeing the world come and having a sense of the world looking at us.

KB#2 [00:02:09] Yes.

KB [00:02:10] It was, that was a great event.

BG [00:02:12] I'm just going to shut these blinds for a second.

KB [00:02:14] Yeah, I realize you're probably going to get a lot --.

BG [00:02:16] The sun just sort of started shining at us.

KB [00:02:20] Prison effects, yeah.

BG [00:02:21] Which we don't need. There we go. All right. So, can you tell us a little bit more about how you were raised? Was politics or labour issues an issue in your home?

KB [00:02:34] That's a very funny question, because the short answer is, no, utterly no. My father was a businessman, a very ambitious one, and he was also alcoholic. So, we got into this tradition in our family from the time I was about ten. My mom would always make a big -- it was British -- so we would make, she would make this wonderful roast beef and yorkshire pudding dinner every Sunday night, we'd all sit down and eat it. What I didn't realize until years later was my dad had been drinking martinis all day, and he would be very drunk by the time he got to the table. He started, when I was about 10 to 12, criticizing my mum, and my mum never said a word. It increasingly bothered me, and I kept waiting for my brother. This was in the '60s, it was all about the boys. I kept waiting for my younger brother to say something, and he never did. So, finally I started speaking up to my dad, defending my mum, and then somehow. So we got into these regular Sunday night arguments and then somehow, that switched on to working guys. The guys who used to have lunch bags and go to work every morning at eight and come home every night at five. My dad would mock them. I, by then, I was into whatever my dad disliked, I liked. So, I'd defend the working guys, and he later -- they became, they were really unpleasant. It was the family joke that Dad and I would fight every Sunday night. Later he said to me, 'You know, you should thank me. I made you a feminist and a trade unionist.' It was basically right, but it wasn't a very pleasant process.

BG [00:04:28] Right. So, what was your first experience with labour and work?

KB [00:04:37] It didn't come 'til I was in a second year apprenticeship at BCIT (British Columbia institute of Technology). I think it was in BCIT. The union, Bill Darnell, who was doing apprenticeship at that time through the Carpenters, came to one of the classes and said, 'You know, if any of you want to sign up, we'd love to have you.' And I, up until then, I had -- I knew nothing about unions, except that my father hated them, which sort of put them in some favour. So, it was one of those times where, you know, you're a tradesperson. Work is always like, what's the next job, where am I going? And I was the only woman at that point. I'd never met another woman doing this work. So, yeah. So, I signed up with the union, and then I got a phone call from Bill Darnell. He said, 'I'm the union apprenticeship guy.' Oh, yeah, right, I remember that, and he said, 'We would like you to join the union, the Vancouver local of the Carpenters' Union.' I was really nervous. He said, 'You'd be the first woman.' The job I had just been on was a framing job, a non-union framing job, and it was -- I was terribly harassed there, and I'd had a really bad accident, so they fired me. So, I was really nervous about going onto a crew again, let alone a union crew. I just had no idea what to expect, except it sounded very big and potentially dangerous to me as a woman. I, by that time, I was working for one man and he was a lovely guy. He had apprenticed me. Only the work was getting a bit boring; not boring, but I knew I was avid to learn more. He was a wonderful teacher, but we were renovating, so it was becoming a bit repetitious and I was curious about the big, big buildings. So, I went down very nervously to the local. Bill said, 'Well, why don't you come down and talk to one of the business agents?' So, I went down, and I talked to Alec Baird and Bill. Alec, the first story he said to me, Scottish guy, he said, 'What are you worried about?' I said, 'I'm worried about harassment, because I don't want to go through that again.' And he said, 'Oh, yeah, I know about that.' And he told me the story about his first job in Scotland. He was quite young, 17, 18, and he had been harassed by all the older women. Later I thought, how was that going to make me feel better?

KB#2 [00:07:30] That's right.

KB [00:07:32] But it did. I mean, what it meant is he knew the word. He knew what it meant, and he said, 'You know, this is a union. We have policies. We're going to do our best to make sure you're not hassled on the job.' And I was very intrigued by the work. I wanted to do, you know, concrete work, I wanted to do big jobs, but still, when I went in on my first day for the dispatch -- the dispatcher at that point was a lovely guy called Steve Cress, and so he gave me a dispatch slip. Before I took it, I said, I was really nervous. I said, 'I just want to know that if I have trouble on this job, there's someone to back me up.' And Steve sort of rolled back. He had a very plastic face, and he rolled up his eyebrows, and he stuck his thumbs in his belt, and he said, 'What do you mean, back you up?' I said, 'Well, if there's any harassment on this job, I don't want to go through that alone anymore.' And Steve said, 'Sister,' he said, 'in this union, if you have any trouble, we're all behind you.'

KB#2 [00:08:49] Yeah.

KB [00:08:50] And it was so...

KB#2 [00:08:51] Good one.

KB [00:08:52] It was so lovely. It was so, it was so Steve Cress, and it turned out to be a perfect introduction to the Carpenters' Union.

KB#2 [00:09:00] Just to go back to the beginning, how did you choose woodwork? How did you actually move from where you were? I would assume your father was thinking, 'She's going to be a carpenter?'

KB [00:09:12] Oh, no, no, no. It never crossed my mind to be a carpenter. Are you kidding? In the '60s, girls could be a nurse, a secretary or a teacher. It was actually, I say now, the hardest thing I ever did or the biggest leap I ever made was just imagining doing physical work, let alone being a carpenter. That came way later, and it wasn't even my idea. I was at a party. I was living on Pender Island, and I loved it there, but I was running out of money. I wanted to stay, but I had no money. I had tried for the "girl jobs", you know, childcare, even waitressing. I knew I'd be a horrible waitress. I'm really clumsy. Anyway, there were no jobs. So, I was at a party one night standing around with some guys, and they were all talking about how great Pender was, and I said, 'Yeah, but..' -- And how cheap it was to live there -- I said, 'Yeah, but there's no work. I'm going to have to leave.' And one of them said, 'Well, I just quit my job at the school as a carpenter. Why don't you go down tomorrow?' They were building a new school. Very big job on the island. 'Go down tomorrow and apply for a job as a carpenter.' And it's, nowadays, even now, it's hard to imagine how utterly unimaginable that was. It would never have crossed my mind in a million years, but he said it. So, all apart from all the obvious reasons, I said to him, 'Well, I don't know how to build anything.' And he said, 'No problem. Lie.' And all the guys went, 'Mhmm.' It was such a guy conversation.

KB#2 [00:11:02] (unclear) conversation.

KB [00:11:03] Welcome to the trades. Sure, you lie. Later, they would call it bullshit. We would call it lying, but anyway. So I was, like, dazzled, but I was broke. I was desperate. So, I was like, okay, I'll try anything. So, one of them lent me a tool belt, and I had a hammer. Luckily, I had steel-toed boots. The summer before, I had piled lumber. So, I actually had a clue that I do like physical labour. So, I went down the next morning in fear and trembling, and told the foreman that when we came to the vital question about your

experience, I said I'd built houses up north. Thinking that he couldn't check there. Later, I found out he used to live up north. But he was a very smart guy. Very psychological guy, Ray Hill was his name, became a good friend eventually. Ray said, told me later, the guys had been slowing down. So he thought maybe if I hire a woman, which is totally unheard of, that the guys would speed up just to show off, no matter how useless I was; and I was totally useless at the beginning. So he did. He hired me, and then he went home also that night and he said to his wife, Beth Hill, who was a writer. He said, 'You'll never guess what happened today. This woman wants a job in construction.' And Beth said, 'Well, hire her.' You know, sort of my feminist backup. So, he did. He told me later, that when he watched -- as he watched me cross the, you know, it was rough ground up to the shack where he was. The foreman shack. He said he'd watch me walk and he knew I had never been on a construction site in my life. I thought, "God, he's brilliant. How did he know that?" Later on, after I'd been in the trade for years, I knew exactly how he knew. I mean, you know, what kind of tradesperson someone is when they walk up to their tools in the morning, by the time they get their toolbelt on. So, he hired me and I just, I was in love with it within a week. It was like, oh, my God, why did no one tell me about this? I was still useless, but I was so eager to learn, which is really all you ask of a new employee, someone who clearly doesn't know anything. So I was, I just soaked it all up. Anything I could do, I wanted to do. I was always there on time. I was always, you know, volunteered. So, yeah.

KB#2 [00:13:37] Did the guys speed up?

KB [00:13:39] Ray said, Ray told me later, 'Yes, they sped up for a while.' And then I said to him, 'And that's when you hired the second woman, isn't it?' And he said, 'Yeah.' I said, 'Did it work the second time?' He said, 'No. They got smart.'

BG [00:13:56] So, how did working in construction compare to your other working experiences up until that point?

KB [00:14:02] Wow. Was no comparison. I knew that I hadn't found my niche, but given nurse, secretary, teacher, I didn't want to teach. It was too much like parenting, and I been the oldest of six kids and I didn't want to do that anymore. Nursing, I throw up when I see other people throw up, and I can't stand the sight of blood, so I thought, okay, that's not going to work. So, secretary was all I had left, and I had trained. I had my B.A. (Bachelor of Arts), I went to a special program that was B.A. Secretarial so I could be a private secretary, but I was very bad at it. I actually did work as a secretary in England, as a temp at the university, and I remember the boss took me in to do shorthand one day. I was the assistant to his secretary. So I went, and I could do shorthand. So, I did the shorthand, and I'm very poor -- I was then -- at reading it back. So, what I had done, I can't believe this in hindsight, what I had done was I gave him back everything I could transcribe, and then I attached a note saying, 'Could you please fill in the blanks?' What? I was so -- I was such a blank-head. Anyway, so his secretary took me behind the door and said, 'Maybe you'd better move along.' Then the next secretarial job I had, they had this ancient office machine. This is back in '67, '68, and I managed in making a copy of something, I managed to erase the president of the company's signature. On top of all that, I just didn't like it. It seemed sort of like, why am I doing this? It wasn't very satisfying. So I did secretarial, I did reception, I did childcare, I did a lot of kid jobs looking after kids. I did some teaching English as a second language, that was a bit more fun, but I knew none of it was really what I want to do with my life. Then this job on Pender came up when I was almost 30, and I was getting to that point where it's like, 'Okay, what are you going to be when you grow up? You know, you're thirty years old.' That was a kick in the pants, too. So, but once I started in construction, what hooked me first was the physicalness of it. I

loved, I love being outdoors. I love tromping around, you know, I guess I was a tomboy, although I never knew that. I like my big boots, and I like getting dirty. The guys used to joke I was always the dirtiest one on the job, but the means -- and the money was the best money I ever made in my life. Better than twice what women make, but it was mostly having the solid products. You know, at the end of every day, I could see what I'd done with my own two hands and how well, you know. Bad day, good day, but you couldn't take that away. I guess as I got more skilled and more confident in it, you know, working on a job, especially framing. I liked framing a lot. When you've got a decent crew, and the walls are going up and the sun is shining, there's a light breeze and you're sort of joking around with the guys, and work's going well. It was just the most -- it was as if all of my masculine part and all of my female part were together. I never felt so whole as when I was doing construction. So, yeah, no, I was mad about it.

BG [00:17:58] It's like night and day.

KB [00:17:59] Yeah. Totally different. Yeah.

BG [00:18:02] I wonder if we might be able to shut the door and put on a fan or something instead, just because of the construction noise that's happening outside.

KB [00:18:09] Oh yeah, speaking of construction.

BG [00:18:10] It's great for talking about construction.

KB [00:18:12] Yeah, well, I can just --

KB#2 [00:18:16] Did you actually apprenticeship through the union, or had you started in the private company and then were taken in to the Carpenters Union as an apprentice?

KB [00:18:28] Yeah, I started. I started, I got indentured first by a non-union company. By this single man, after the job where I was badly harassed on that framing job. Took me a long time. So, this was like early eighties, still unheard of for women to be doing this work, and it took me a long time to find a job. I went down to what was then called Manpower. They asked me about my secretarial skills, and then I went back to different counsellor at Manpower, and I finally found a woman who gave me a list of all the people, so that was the first time. I think what I did was I went through all the lists, and finally I just started going through the phonebook. All the contractors. I found this guy, Jacques Carpay in North Vancouver, and he really didn't want to hire me. Like most of them, they'd hear my voice and it was like, 'Oh, sorry, we're busy. Oh, no, we changed our minds.' You know, they didn't, and Jack wanted to get rid of me too, but I was getting -- desperation is a great motivator, and so I kept talking to him. I mean, it was useful, my university degree came in handy because I could talk. So I found out that he had a daughter. I said to him, 'You know, it's been hard for me to find jobs. I got my four months, you know, Pre-App (Pre-Apprenticeship) training. I love this work. I've worked as a framer.' I found out his daughter was having trouble getting promoted in management because she was the first woman. This was in London Drugs, and so I saw a little opening and I went there and I said to him, 'I'll work for you for free for the week.' If he would just let me try. So he said, 'Well,' Jack was a little rough. He said, 'Well, come on down. We'll see how it goes.' So, I went down to the job site and so he said to me, 'Okay, well,' So, we talked and he said, 'You can start tomorrow.' I said, 'Well, I'm willing to work for nothing.' He said, 'No, I'm going to pay you. I'm going to pay you.' So, after about two months he said, 'Go get those papers.' At that

point, I hadn't been thinking about apprenticeship. He said, 'Look, your apprenticeship, we're going to get you working.'

KB#2 [00:20:51] Excellent.

KB [00:20:51] Yeah. He was a very fine man. Yeah, I was very grateful for him.

BG [00:20:57] So what year do you think it was when you got that first job on Pender Island? Was that -- that was early '80s or later on?

KB [00:21:04] No, that was '77.

BG [00:21:06] Okay, and so can you tell us a little bit about the diversity of the workforce at that time?

KB [00:21:14] The fact that none of us had ever heard of another woman. There was no diversity of any kind. I don't think I ever worked with anyone other than a white male until the '80s, anyway. In my entire career, 15 years in the trade working on the tools it was, it was one Indigenous guy. One Sikh guy, who was the crane operator. Very clever, because nobody messes with the crane operator, and one Asian guy. That was in 15 years of pretty steady work.

KB#2 [00:22:02] And you would have seen the other building trades at the same time.

KB [00:22:06] Oh yeah, especially when I was working for the union. So high rises, I worked Skytrain, Pacific Centre, Brentwood Mall. Yeah.

KB#2 [00:22:16] You didn't see any other diversification at that time either?

KB [00:22:20] No women. No women, no men of colour, no First Nations men.

BG [00:22:27] So, likely the same for supervisors and management then, at higher levels. Was there any?

KB [00:22:33] Totally, no, I never. Well, I mean, having said that, we didn't see upper level people on the job. You see the foreman, you might see the WCB (Workers Compensation Board) guy, inspector, but no. We were, you know, front line supervisors was what we saw, and those were all white guys.

KB#2 [00:22:52] Did you -- was the Women In Trades started at BCIT when you were there? No, it hadn't started yet?

KB [00:22:58] No, we started Women In Trades. Oh, what year was that? It was right around 1980. I had just finished my degree. On Pender Island, I worked as a labourer and I decided, like, I'd broken off my master's degree to to go to Pender Island because I was figuring out I didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up. So, I went back to SFU (Simon Fraser University) after my two years as a labourer and finished my degree, and I did my thesis on women in non-traditional work in B.C. At that time -- and I did it as a therapy project because I wanted to talk to another woman. I'd never talked -- that's not true. Ray's son, John Hill, his girlfriend at the time. I happened to be visiting the Hills one weekend, they lived on Saltspring Island, and she dropped in. Her name was Judy Crowley, and just as I was leaving to catch the ferry to go back to Pender Island. Ray said

to me, 'Oh you should meet Judy, she's a bush pilot.' I went, 'A what?' She was one of the very first women bush pilots, and I was desperate to talk to her. All we had time to do was to say, I said to her, 'So, how are the men?' And she said, 'Well, you know.' She said, 'Once in a while I get one who won't fly with me.' I said, 'Well, what do you do?' And she said, 'I fly without them.' So, that sort of seeded my thirst to talk to other women. So, that was my thesis. I travelled around northern B.C. and talked to, I can't remember now, 20 women maybe, about. Had to really search them out. Fisherwomen, loggers. These were like really early days, and we had all just started because there was a B.C. Human Rights Commission that had threatened employers with, you know, hellfire and damnation if they didn't hire regardless of gender or colour. So, it was really important to me, and once I talked to these other women, I found we all had exactly the same issues. We had exactly the same problems. It didn't matter what you were doing. It was the problem of dealing with the guys and the guy culture and their attitude. So, then I had the courage to go back and sign up for my pre-apprentice training.

KB#2 [00:25:30] Do you still have a list of those women?

KB [00:25:34] Yes, it would be, because it's in my thesis.

KB#2 [00:25:36] Okay. Excellent.

BG [00:25:38] That's in the SFU archives. Isn't it?

KB [00:25:39] Yeah

BG [00:25:41] Yeah, I think I saw that.

KB [00:25:41] It's called Invisible Women.

BG [00:25:43] Great.

KB [00:25:44] Which I think I didn't exactly your question. The question was about....

KB#2 [00:25:49] Women In Trades.

KB [00:25:49] Yeah. So, after I got my degree in 1980 and then I went to Pre-App. In March, so I was still in my Pre-Apprentice Training, on International Women's Day in those days we used to have big parades and workshops and everything. So, someone had phoned me, I think it was Annabelle. Annabelle Paxton, and she said, 'I'm looking for some workshops for International Women's Day. What do you think?' And I said, 'Do you think there's any chance if we had a workshop for women in trades, would anyone come?' For women in construction or something.

KB#2 [00:26:25] Non-traditional.

KB [00:26:25] Non-traditional work. Yeah, that's what we called it. She said, 'Well, I would.' I think it was Annabelle Paxton. Anyway, this woman was working for Press Gang, which was a women's press in the city, which was very radical at the time and, you know, a hotbed of lesbians. So, we thought, okay, well, that'll make two of us at the workshop. So, we held a workshop and when I went in, the room was full of women and I checked the room number. Right. It was an extraordinary experience because here I was, I never met, never worked with except Judy Crowley and the women up north. We went around the

table with these women saying, 'I'm a carpenter.' We were all apprenticed, but, 'I'm a carpenter. I'm a welder, I'm an electronics technician.' It was just... It was heart stopping. It was so thrilling to have other women. So, that was it. By the time that meeting was over, we couldn't stop talking to each other. So, we said, 'Okay, well, that's it. We're going to form an organisation.' That was the beginning of Women In Trades, and that's what kept me going to the trades. I couldn't have kept going some days without those women.

KB#2 [00:27:45] Now, Anne St. Eloi, was she the first director of that at BCIT? Because it became a program.

KB [00:27:53] Oh, of the Women In Trades program. Oh gosh. Did she do that early on?

KB#2 [00:28:02] Very early on.

KB [00:28:02] Yeah. Then it was Anne and then Kate.... Oh God.

KB#2 [00:28:07] Pelletier.

KB [00:28:09] Pelletier, yeah. Who's now the Dean of Trades at Selkirk.

KB#2 [00:28:13] No. No, she isn't. She's actually gone to England.

KB [00:28:17] What?

KB#2 [00:28:18] Yeah, she left and went to England.

KB [00:28:20] Really? What for?

KB#2 [00:28:20] That's what -- I have no idea. That's what I was told.

KB [00:28:26] Oh my goodness.

KB#2 [00:28:26] I was talking with Danny Bradford, who is a BCGEU guy, and he said, 'Oh yeah.' He nominated her for Dean. So she was Dean for a while and then she's left us. What I'm told.

KB [00:28:38] Well, I'm in touch with her, so I'll have to say, 'What are you doing?' And then Tamara has been doing it.

KB#2 [00:28:46] Yes, Tamara is still there.

KB [00:28:47] Yeah. Very long time.

BG [00:28:50] So, you already talked a little bit about your introduction to the union. Can you talk a little bit more about what your experiences were with unionized work versus non-unionized over the years?

KB [00:29:06] In general, I'm hesitating because there were so many different kinds of experiences. In general, they were very good. You know, Steve Cress was right, the union backed me up. There wasn't much harassment, although in my first job it was a sort of a backward harassment. Very, very nice crew. Very nice guys. I never worked with union guys who had ever worked with another woman. So, it was always, I was always breaking

people in, if that's the word. The guy who was my partner on that very first job was a very sweet guy, European, very, very good tradesman, but he had a lot of trouble with me being a woman. He kept saying to me, 'If you were my wife, you know, you wouldn't be here. If you were my wife.' And I tried everything that came about. You know, I'd joke with him. I'd say, 'Jurgen', I don't want to marry you. I just want you to work with me.' Like, everything. In the end, he couldn't handle it and he started sort of, everything I do he'd say, 'Be careful. Be careful.' And you know, we were working at heights all the time. Someone yelling be careful all the time actually sort of makes you nervous. He actually one day, he actually blocked me from working, physically stood in my way. There was no reason for him to stand there, but it was very clear he just really didn't want me there. I went home that night. I thought, 'Okay, that's it. I'm out of here. I can't do this. I can't deal with this.' And it was one of the amazing nights when usually, Women in Trades, we only met about once a month and we never talked to each other usually in the between time. You're working so hard, you're so tired; but that night, three women phoned me from Women In Trades, one after the other. They'd say, 'How are you?' And I'd go, 'Oh. I can't do this.' They gave me the pep talk. 'You can do this. This is Jurgen's problem, you know, go to the union.' So I realized that if I -- oh, and the other thing that had happened that day was I had had an accident, and I know it was because I was so freaked, I was so distracted. The two times I've had accidents on the job were I was distracted by being harassed. We were laying four by fours over steel scaffolding, so that we could lay plywood so the guys could pour concrete. The ironworkers come, and then pour concrete the next day, so -- and it was a rush job. Rush jobs are always bad, and so guys were using shorter and shorter pieces, of four by four, and some of them weren't properly supported at both ends. So sure enough, I was coming back. I had gone to pick up, I didn't wait for the labourer, I went and picked up a load of four by four. Sometimes I carry them on my shoulder like the guys, but more often, I carried them across my hips. I mean, physically as a woman, our strength is in our lower body, our hips. So, I often used to carry that way, and I was that day, thank God. So, I stepped on one of those unsupported four by fours, and we were two stories up above a concrete floor. I think it was going to be a tennis court eventually. I could actually see as I started to fall, the rebar sticking up below, which is where a wall would eventually have been joined in. So, everything goes into slow motion. So, I was very slowly falling through this hole watching the rebar and the four bys that I was carrying caught on the four by fours beside me, and it had been like sort of being in honey. I was going, everything was really, really slow. The sound had changed, and then suddenly I heard that thunk of the wood hitting and then sound came back and the guys were saying, 'Get her out of there.' They pulled me out. So that was the night I went home and I said, 'Okay, that's it. I'm going to die if I don't get out of here.' And all these women phoned me. So, the next day I went back to work. I said to Yurgin, 'You have to let me do this job. I'm being paid for it. I want to do it. I can do it.' And he was very sweet. He kept trying to get back to work and avoid my eyes, but I knew I was going to die if I didn't, if we didn't have this out. So finally he said, 'Well okay, we'll try it.' And he was okay after that, we worked it out, but yeah, I forget what the initial question was.

BG [00:34:04] So then did the union, did you feel that it provided you kind of a route then to pursue if there was harassment or grievances?

KB [00:34:13] Well, it's interesting. I did go into the union the next night. I talked to Tom Murphy, who was then working with apprentices, and Tom was great. He said, 'You know, you could ask your foreman.' He said, 'The foreman should know there's trouble there.' And in fact, in hindsight, I'm utterly certain the foreman knew, but there's this sort of guy culture thing where you don't say anything. I later found out more about that, but at the time, the foreman, Tom said, 'Probably what's happening is the foreman is waiting for you

to fix it, and that's what guys do.' So Tom said, 'You can ask for a transfer for another partner, but that sort of makes you look like a troublemaker.' God forbid. So, that's when I went back in and had a talk with Juergen, and by then it was okay. We had worked it out. So the union was there, and they got even better. Very shortly, now I can't remember the date, but the head of our Provincial Council was Bill Zander, and his assistant was Colin Snell. Wonderful men, and quite soon after I started, I was the first woman in the Vancouver Local. I think in all of B.C., Marcia Braundy was in the Kootenays.

KB#2 [00:35:40] Yes.

KB [00:35:41] There were two of us that I knew of. There was a local of clerical women in the north, and that was it. Bill Zander got a harassment clause in the contract, which blew all of us at Women In Trades away, because we hadn't even asked for it. Like that was beyond. In fact, that was when the word sexual harassment was still very new. It was just something we had learnt, that there is a word for this, and Bill put in a harassment clause and it didn't say women. It said worker. Something about every worker has the right to work under conditions free of harassment. It was very general, and I found out later that -- and it made me feel protected. It made me feel, I knew I had recourse if I needed it, and I never did. I found out later, one of the business agents told me at a social event one night that in fact, that clause had been used several times by guys working up in the camps, being harassed by other men. So, it gave courage to the men, let alone the women. It was great. So, yeah, I had a lot of protection from Bill. He organized, he and Colin and the leadership -- Bill Tkachuk was another guy, or John Tkachuk, head of our local, which was then 452 -- had a conference for women carpenters and it was, you know, two of the carpenters and the rest were clerical workers, but just to be together. All of that was very supportive. I was included in the union in quite, I mean, in hindsight, very generous ways. Like, I was active in the union. So, things got very bad, right after I joined, work was -- there was no work in the early '80s and it got so we'd be, there'd be a four month job and they'd break it up into two weeks or two months or whatever the basic qualifying time for unemployment insurance was. We'd each take that long and then pass the job along, so we could at least get U.I. while we were off. So, during that time I was on the Apprenticeship Committee and I was on the Unemployment Committee, so I was working in the union and I felt completely at ease there. I had real allies. Perhaps not a great coincidence that several of them were men of colour. Then, what was I going to tell you about union support? It'll come back.

BG [00:38:29] So, you mentioned there was a few different unions you were a part of over the years, or was it just the one?

KB [00:38:38] No, just the one.

BG [00:38:39] Okay.

KB [00:38:39] Oh, well, sorry. When I worked at BCIT there was a union, I taught creative writing at what was then Malaspina, there was a union, but just one trade union.

BG [00:38:49] In terms of trades.

KB [00:38:50] Yeah. Oh, one other thing the union did was Bill invited me to speak to the Carpenters' convention about being a woman carpenter.

BG [00:39:03] When was that around, do you recall?

KB [00:39:04] That was still early, early mid-80s. You know, he really stuck his neck out a lot for the guys. He championed women, really, and I have huge respect for him for that. He was one of those guys. Our local was called Red Square, because I guess there were a lot of communists, ex-communists, sort of communists, socialists, whatever. But what they were was principled human beings. Like, I loved those guys. They were, it was, 'Yeah, this is very new having women here, but it's the right thing to do. You know, she likes this work. She does her job. She has as much right to be here as any of the others.' So, they stood up for us and I did. I deeply appreciated that.

KB#2 [00:40:02] Did that translate over into any activism at the BC Fed?

KB [00:40:06] For me?

KB#2 [00:40:07] Through you, through the Carpenters' Union.

KB [00:40:10] I was on the Women's Committee at the BC Fed, yeah, for the Carpenters. Yeah, and I was on that committee for quite a while. Then later when I left the trade, I worked at SFU in Continuing Studies in the Labour program, being a liaison between the unions and the university, which was great, and I was really happy to do. We did some really good things with training, labour training, including we set up a series of one week conferences for union women. Training women in terms of leadership. We almost got started on a management program for union leadership and it was only if I would sort of go into, you know, President's offices and close the door and not say the word management in front of anyone. They would say, 'Yeah, you know, we need to learn how do we handle staff? How do we, what do we do when we have problems? What's a good way to organize the financing? So, I was organizing a lot of university people. Mind you, it was hard to find people who were open to labour, but then I left. That was when I went back to school for the creative writing, so it didn't carry on.

BG [00:41:31] So, going back to working construction, you started to keep a journal of your experiences. At what point did you realize that that was actually poetry that you were writing?

KB [00:41:44] Well, I didn't keep it as a journal. I kept it out of desperation. I've always sort of kept journals, and when I started in that very first job on Pender Island, it was so weird. The guy thing was so weird. The culture. Guys who I knew, like socialized. One of them had been my boyfriend, although he never talked to me again, but I liked these guys; and yet suddenly they were, when they were together on a construction site, they're talking in like one-liners and it didn't make sense, and it was all competitive. So, I started just writing it all down. That was just my habit, to try and figure it out. I had no one to talk to. So, I would come home every night after work, and write -- type -- typewriter on yellow sheets of paper. I'd do three or four pages single-spaced of what had happened at work that day. Just trying to figure it out for myself. Eventually, I say now, I became bilingual. I learnt "guy talk", and I can do guy talk. In fact, when I started teaching right after that, I had to be very careful because I would do guy talk in the classroom. You'd see this look of horror on some poor guys face, and I'd go, 'Oh no, not construction site.' But yeah, so I had been keeping these journals forever, but the work is hard. I mean, I loved it, but it was hard work. So when you come home, you were maybe, you know -- especially when I was contracting eight, ten, twelve-hour days, four or five, six, seven days a week. So I was tired often. I just wanted -- so, I was still keeping notes out of habit at that point, but I just wanted to go to bed. So, I started to notice that my entries were getting smaller, and the

lines were getting shorter. Then finally I thought, you know, this kind of looks like a poem. I eventually got up the nerve to show somebody and he said, 'Yeah, it is a poem.' So, that was the beginning of my construction poems.

BG [00:43:53] That's interesting. So, when did you decide to share that as a collection? Your first one is Covering Rough Ground.

KB [00:44:01] Yeah, well, that's where Tom Whalen comes into the picture. I had been working, this is 1986, I was working up north and I had gone to Dease Lake. This is actually a lovely turn of the wheel. Ray Hill, the first man who ever hired me on Pender Island, was looking for someone to build a house for his son, who was a bush pilot up north. So, I ended up going up north. Finally, my lie came true, and I built a house for Ray up north in Dease Lake, and I really loved the north. I had been there before, but there wasn't a lot of work in Dease Lake. There's about 300 people there. So John, his son, got wind of them needing a carpenter in the bush in a mining camp called Muddy Lake. So, I went into Muddy Lake. I worked in there with a crew of Native guys, which was an amazing experience. Wonderful, wonderful. First time I totally took possession of being a carpenter. I'm a carpenter, and I think it was no coincidence it was First Nations guys, because they didn't have any -- it was a deep acceptance that I got from them that I had never gotten, even from the good white guys. Later, a Native woman said to me, she said, 'Well, of course, they've live with matriarchy. They can accept female authority.' Because I was also the most skilled carpenter in the camp. So anyway, I came -- it gave me a chance when I was up north to think a lot, and there's nothing to do. So, I decided I was going to go back to writing. I wanted to take my writing seriously. So, when I came back south I found a brochure somewhere for a writing school, Kootenay School of Writing, never heard of it, and I went in and signed up. There was one class on writing about work, and there was one class on just generally writing poetry, and I thought, 'Well, I'll take the more general class. That makes more sense.' And the guy who was teaching it, Calvin, he's a friend of mine now.

KB#2 [00:46:13] Yes. Wharton?

KB [00:46:15] Yeah, Calvin Wharton. He had said before the class started, bring one of your poems to read in class. So I, turned out I was one of the only ones who did, and it was a work poem. So, I read my poem out in class, and I had never -- it was the first time I'd ever read them to more than one single person in the universe. So, he did a bit of feedback on it, which was difficult the very first time. Then he said, there are too many people in this class, would anyone like to go across the hall to the other class on work writing. Nobody volunteered. So he said, 'Kate. Why don't you go?' So, I was convinced it was because he hated my poem. It's because he hated my poem, and he didn't want me in his class. Well, we laughed about it later because the guy across the hall was Tom Wayman, who was doing a class on work writing. He's a wonderful man, passionate about writing, the importance of writing about work, and it was like I found my mentor. So, I took Tom's class. I wrote way more about work, and it was Tom who said, 'Why don't you put together a book?' And I had no idea, how do you do that? So, he actually put up the first book, he said, 'Give me your poems, I'll give you some ideas.' And another friend of mine, Sandy Shrew did as well, and that was my first book. You know, who knew? It's like one of those things, like, when I grow up, I'll be a carpenter? I'd never. You know, when I grow up, I'll be a writer? No.

KB#2 [00:47:51] Yeah.

KB [00:47:52] So, life brings you surprises.

BG [00:47:57] So, in your opinion, what role does art, music and literature serve in the labour movement?

KB [00:48:05] I wish it served a bigger role. It's fun, for one thing. I mean, a lot of unions, I was very involved. I haven't talked about when I was on the executive of the Carpenters, which was fraught; but one of the things we did do, Chrissy Gibson and I -- she was the other woman who for a while was in our local -- we organized a cabaret for the Carpenters. You know, there was music and skits and I don't remember if there was poetry or not, but it lightens things. It gives you another perspective. I'll tell you, this was working with Tom. He invited me to join his group, the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union, which was all people writing, I think we were all poets writing about work. We decided, there was a guy called Julius Fisher who put together, got this idea for a thing called Mayworks. That we would have a weekend of labour celebrations. Well, it sounded insane at the time, like, who cares? But there was no sense, very little sense of labour's story. There was no sense of labour songs. Like maybe the odd song, the Wobbly songs. Some people would know Solidarity Forever. That was it. So, we put together the show, and we worked our -- the poets worked with a musical group of women, the Euphonious Quintet? Euphonious Five? Maggie Benston was in there.

KB#2 [00:49:42] Yeah.

KB [00:49:42] Anyway, it was women singing about work, and we put together a show that was going to be put on at Vancouver East Cultural Centre, which is a big venue. We were really nervous. We begged all our friends and family, 'Please, you've got to come. We've got to have people in the audience.' We sealed off the balcony. So, we did. We had a pretty good audience. And when we started -- so this was so radical, the idea of writing or talking about your work. Like, who were we? And we were a carpenter, social worker, a teacher, a secretary, a doctor, secretary, a lot of secretaries. So, we started doing this, and we did some things about unemployment. We did some things about the work, we did some things about -- like we had sort of theme areas that we worked out with the musicians, and it might have been Fraser Union in that. In that first performance, too. I can't remember. Guys who sing about work, still do. And the audience, we could see the audience, because it was regular lights on, and at first they were very uncomfortable. Then they started -- because it was like, 'What is this, anyway?' And then you can see they were sort of relaxing, and you'd see them start to smile and look at their neighbour, and then they'd get serious again, but they got into it. By the end of the show, we had given the song sheets for the final song. It was not Solidarity Forever. Whatever it was, it was a fairly easy song to learn. By the end, they all stood up and joined arms and were rocking back and forth, singing the song. It was a joyous, fabulous event and wildly successful. After, a friend of mine came up. She said -- she was with her ten-year old son -- she said, 'He has something to tell you.' He looks at me with these big huge eyes, and he said, 'That's the best show I ever saw.' It was like, we all felt like it made people feel good to have their work honoured.

KB#2 [00:51:49] Yes.

KB [00:51:51] To celebrate, even. To celebrate our work. We're the people who make the world work, not the guys with the paper who are making million dollar deals for their buddies. We're the people who clean it and cook it and build it. I mean, you gotta teach the kids. So yeah, I think it's really, really important. Yeah.

BG [00:52:13] I'm just going to open these blinds again, since we've had another change of light.

KB [00:52:17] We've gone dark, yeah.

BG [00:52:18] Just keep adjusting.

KB [00:52:22] You're going to find some light variation in this.

BG [00:52:25] Yes, but it's no worries. Perfect. So, why don't you tell us a little bit about working on the Carpenters' executive, if you'd like?

KB [00:52:37] Well, the way it happened was, there was an election coming up, and so they called for nominations in the union meeting for positions of the union. Much to my surprise, someone nominated me for a position on the executive as a trustee. It was, you know, they had explained it's a pretty easy position. You go in once a month, and you check the books, and there were three of us. So it's --

KB#2 [00:53:09] You were a trustee?

KB [00:53:10] Yeah. As a trustee.

KB#2 [00:53:11] Okay.

KB [00:53:12] So, it was pretty straightforward. There were three of us. So, it was a good entry level position into union executive work. So, I accepted the nomination, and then -- now I can't remember exactly -- the union was quite divided between right and left. This was part of the downside of being Red Square. I was in the left caucus. So, they called the caucus meeting and said that they had chosen the slate that would be running, and the slate was all the guys and I wasn't on the slate. So afterwards, some of the guys, including the guy who nominated me, came up to me and said, 'How did you feel about that?' And I said, 'You know what? If that's the way they want to do it? You know, they know more than I, and what do I know? I'll go along with it.' So, I did, and what happened was the left slate -- we were running left slate versus the right wing slate -- the left slate won, and the international stepped in and annulled the election. Which in those days, politics was fierce, and the "lefty" thing was very big. So, they annulled the election and we had to do it all over again. So, we had a big meeting of the left slate, of the left caucus and they started laying out the slate again, and I'll be damned if a couple of guys didn't stand up and say, 'We want Kate on the slate.' So I said, 'Okay, so I'll run.' So they put me on the slate. So, I ran as trustee and it was rough. It wasn't about me as a woman. It was about me being a lefty, which was quite different. Although, they used being a woman against me. Like at one point, I remember I was -- we all, the battlefield was the parking lot in front of the union hall. That's where we'd all hang out and glare at each other. Poor guys just trying to get in to pay their dues and get dispatched would have to walk through this. One of them came up to me and said, 'So, what does your husband think of all this?' And he said something about my husband that showed that he actually knew exactly what my husband had been doing recently, which was a bit creepy. Apart from just like, what does that have to do with anything? So, they used some of that, but basically I did. I got elected and I, to tell you the truth, I was surprised because it was a vote of the whole local. It was a big local, and a lot of it, most of the guys had never worked with me. Like the guys who had worked with me,

knew that I was okay, but the guys who didn't work with me, all they knew was it was a woman. So, it was another sort of vote of confidence getting in there. Yeah.

KB#2 [00:56:23] When you look at the union structure that you've worked through over the years and look forward for the union movement, do you still see the value there? Do you still see people finding a home there? Or are people kind of moving away from that in your mind?

KB [00:56:44] From the union movement?

KB#2 [00:56:45] Yeah.

KB [00:56:45] Well, it's a fact that people are moving away from it, and is that a good thing? No, I think it's not a good thing at all. What the union does, it's sort of like labour arts. What it did for me, and what I've seen it do with a lot of people is it gives you a voice, it gives you confidence. It's like writing a poem about being a carpenter. You realize, 'Oh, what I do is important'. It used to so hurt me. Guys on the job would talk about how dumb they were. I remember one day, we were working downtown, we were building a high-rise and that morning we had just finished. They had poured, it was a huge one of the main bearing beams on the pillars in the building, and so it's about this three-foot square, huge, megaton, wet concrete pillar. I've forgotten a lot of vocabulary already. We had been straightening it, and they have this totally ingenious scheme of bracing and so on, and screwjacks, you know. A twist of the wrist and we could get it exactly right. They're talking, then we go into the lunch shack and they're talking about those smart guys in the offices all around us who get to work indoors and just, you know, with bits of paper. Those are the smart guys. I said, 'Do you guys see what you did this morning? Like, you didn't even think about it, and we're building their buildings for them.' But no, they wanted -- they didn't want their kids to be tradespeople. They wanted their kids to be smart and go to university. You know, like how many university kids are working in McDonalds now? So, what the union did -- obviously not entirely -- but it helped with was, guys like that could feel like, you know, what I have to say, some people, at least my peers want to listen to what I have to say. I'm being consulted with decisions that are made about my life. You know, the contracts and what we do, and health and safety are huge issues that the union was really involved in. So, it gives you honour. It gives respect. I found any time I've seen people give up a union or not have unions, I don't see the same kind of self-respect, let alone wages. You know, you could make a good living wage as a carpenter, union carpenter. So, no, I think that management has been really clever in persuading people that you don't want to be part of that rabble, and people have bought it, and too bad.

BG [00:59:44] So, can you tell us about how you met trade unionist and storyteller Al King, and what led you to writing his memoir?

KB [00:59:56] Huh, how did I meet Al? Oh, I know. I was working up at SFU as the Director of the Labour program, and I had worked with a guy up there, Neil Boyd, and done a booklet on health and safety. Oh, no, the history of the Health and Safety Committee of the BC Fed, and Al either was or had been the head of that committee. So, I produced this booklet and passed it around as broadly as we could, and next thing I know, I think he phoned me and he said, 'I want you to write my memoir.' And I was like, 'Who are you?' At the time, I'd never written non-fiction. I had only written poetry. I said, 'I'm really sorry, but I'm a poet, you know. I don't write labour stories.' Anyway, Al was a good trade unionist, and he was totally persistent. He wouldn't leave me alone. So finally I said, 'Okay, we'll do it.' I met him and I liked him. He was a bit of a gruff guy, but one of those

really like, just salt of the earth. What a good human being, honest and compassionate and tough for other people, on other people's behalf. Passionate about health and safety issues, right till the day he died. So finally I said, 'Okay, I'll help you write a leaflet. Like, we'll do just a little short chat-book, like we did the health and safety booklet.' Okay. So, Al says, 'Okay.' So, he sent me his draft of what he had done so far, and it was just incomprehensible. I mean, he wasn't a writer, and he was so close to his own story. There was no storyline. So, I said, 'Okay Al, we're going to have to do a bit of work on this.' So, I started going over to his place. So five years later, it ended up, I got pulled into his story. I didn't -- I had no idea who he was, where he had come from, what he'd done. Well, Al had done these -- he's one of the foundations of the B.C. labour movement. The person who wrote the foreword to the book was Vince Ready, who's one of B.C.'s outstanding --.

KB#2 [01:02:18] Mediators.

KB [01:02:19] Mediators, yeah. I'll tell you how Al -- I learnt this story from Al, about how Vince got pulled into Al King's orbit was because Al had been at that -- he started out at Cominco, helped organize the union there. Those were the Red Scare days, and Al was a communist. Always sort of low key about that, and organized, got into the executive of Mine Mill (Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers). Joined Mine Mill, organized Mine Mill. Then there were all these raids from Steel. So, there was a very unhappy labour time when Steel was raiding Mine Mill because Mine Mill was the Communist union, and it was the Communist union whose motto was an injury to the one is an injury to all. Like, we could have learned something from each other here, guys. But anyway, so Al -- at that point I forget his exact title, but he was something like -- he was one of the leading leaders of Mine Mill in British Columbia, and he was doing a lot of organizing around new mines. He got a phone call one day from a line manager saying, 'You better get up here. Your guys are on a wildcat strike.' So, Al didn't know anything about it. They weren't his guys, but up he goes, and there were these guys who were doing, whatever it is in mining when you drill the original tunnel, is very dangerous work. These guys had just pulled a wildcat strike, even though they weren't in a union because it was so dangerous, and one of them was Vince Ready. So, great. So Al signed them all up.

KB#2 [01:04:01] Fabulous.

KB [01:04:05] Yeah. So, he ended up forming a team of organizers who went around organizing mines in British Columbia, in the Yukon, in fact in western Canada. And Vince was one of those guys, and Al gave me a picture that's in the book, great picture of these guys. What were they called? King's Wrecking Crew? Just these big, you know, determined, all white guys. One of them was Vince with Al, yeah.

BG [01:04:38] Small world.

KB [01:04:39] Yeah. He ended up working very hard. We had a long talk about the raids from Steel, and eventually, Mine Mill voted to merge with Steel. Now, the real story was Mine Mill couldn't hold out any longer. Steel just had way more resources, and times were changing. So Mine Mill took the honourable way and voted to merge. They did this, but the day Al told me about that just wracked him. He'd been fighting so hard for Mine Mill. He believed so much in that union. This was the first union that invited wives into union meetings. I said, 'Why did you do that, Al?' These are miners and mill workers.' He said, 'What the men do affects their families.' Yeah. He said, 'Including health and safety.' Like, these guys would come out of mines or mills loaded with whatever. Asbestos.

KB#2 [01:05:44] Yeah, all of that.

KB [01:05:45] Women were shaking this out. So he was -- he loved that union, but he did eventually, he joined and worked for Steel. I mean, he was honourable in that way, too. You know, it was an honourable fight. He lost. Mine Mill lost, so he went on and worked for Steel until he retired. He continued working for Steel, doing health and safety claims, until he died of asbestosis that he got on the job.

BG [01:06:18] So have you left the construction industry at that point then, when you started writing this memoir?

KB [01:06:23] Yeah.

BG [01:06:23] Okay.

KB [01:06:24] Yeah, I worked for 15 years and I ended up teaching construction at BCIT.

BG [01:06:29] Right.

KB [01:06:32] I just, I got tired of being the weird one. I wanted to be normal. So, I got into management at SFU, and that wasn't it either. Then I went back to school and got into creative writing. So, at the point that I was at SFU, yeah, that's when I met Al and wrote his book with him.

BG [01:06:54] Did you have questions?

KB#2 [01:06:56] Just need the washroom.

BG [01:06:56] Yeah.

KB [01:06:57] Straight down the hall on the right there, Ken.

BG [01:07:01] So, what made you -- I guess you kind of already spoke to it, but what made you want to pursue creative writing as opposed to continuing in the construction industry?

KB [01:07:14] Well, yeah, I got out of construction because I was tired of being weird. I mean, I had a perfect job. I was at that point, teaching at BCIT which, you know, is a great job, especially as you get older. I was in my forties by then. Your body's sort of getting a bit creaky, and I love teaching. I had wonderful classes. All men. Once, I had a woman go through. I was there for two years, and every six weeks you got a new class.

BG [01:07:47] So, you were teaching through the apprenticeship program then?

KB [01:07:49] Yeah, I was teaching apprentices construction, but one of the other instructors -- and these were instructors who had been my instructors, very neat guys -- but well, I mean, we were just kibitzing around at lunch and one of them said to me, 'Like, can you carry a two by ten, Kate?' It's just standard construction, you know, bullshit. I knew what to say, I said, 'Yeah, and what about you?' I said, 'I can carry a couple. How about you?' He was an older guy. We all knew that was a serious question for him. But it just -- it was like the final straw. I thought, I don't want to do this anymore. I still love the trade, I love teaching the trade, but I want to be normal. So, yeah, that's when I got out of it. After doing the management work for a while, up at SFU, I liked working with labour and it was

sort of a natural connection between university and labour at that point. I had an M.A., but I realized it was soul-deadening for me. I'm not a manager. I find it deadly boring at some level, and I realized that I needed to go more towards the writing. I needed something more creative, more artistic. So, I quit my job at SFU to all my family's horror, because I finally had a regular job. I had. My dad goes, 'You have a business card! A pension! You have pension!' But it was killing me. I felt like I was dying. So, I threw it all over and went back to school for my MFA (Masters of Fine Arts) in creative writing, and that worked out fine. Immediately, I started teaching creative writing, and I loved doing that.

BG [01:09:48] So you taught at SFU, UBC and Malaspina creative writing courses, then?

KB [01:09:55] And a little bit at Cap College. I taught some labour studies, actually, and I taught a bit about oral history as well.

BG [01:10:03] Right. So, can you talk a little bit about how labour played a role in the courses you taught? So was it, were they labour related creative writing courses or labour centric courses or?

KB [01:10:12] No, not at all. They were creative writing courses.

BG [01:10:16] Right, yeah.

KB [01:10:16] But when I was, it mostly happened at Malaspina, which is now Vancouver Island University, I was teaching poetry. That's what I was hired for, but I was writing creative non-fiction and I had this background in labour, and I really wanted to start. Creative non-fiction was just starting to open up. This would have been sort of 2000s. It was just opening up as a genre in Canada, and so I wanted to teach it. One of the first things I thought of in terms of teaching creative non-fiction is non-fiction that's written with some of the tools of fiction. So, it's got more colour. It's not journalism, it's got characters and dialogue and a story, but it's true. It's all true. So my first class, I set up as an oral history class, and I told students they were going to learn how to do interviews. Then they were all going to have to go down and interview local fishermen, and they were horrified. Like, how creative is that? I figured, I was worried I was going to lose half the class. I only lost one person from the first day. So, they did what, you know. They wanted the credit, so they did what they were told to do, and it was so lovely when they came back after they did their interviews. You know, fishermen, can you think of better storytellers? That's all they do, they sit around all day. No, that's not true. They catch a lot of fish in between telling stories.

KB [01:11:56] So, these kids were, young people, were just blown away, and could hardly wait to tell the stories that they had been told. They wrote such good stuff that at the end of the class, the final class, I always used to have a reading. We'd have, because it's important that a writer knows how to present their material. So, that would be their final class and, you know, we'd all dress up and the'd bring coffee and cookies and food. Their stories were so good that I invited a local publisher, Ursula Vaira in and I said, 'You know, these kids are going to be your future writers. They're all local Nanaimo kids, young people or Island people. Why don't you come down and hear what they've done?' And she was so blown away by what they'd done that she published it. So, they all got this beautiful little book called The Fish Come In Dancing, which is all the stories of who were then Nanaimo fishermen, and that industry -- I sent them down there for that because that industry was dying. Then the next year, I made them do the mill there, in Nanaimo.

KB#2 [01:13:06] Harmac?

KB [01:13:07] Harmac, which was about to close. So, by then the word had spread. You know, these working people aren't so boring, actually. So, by then it was sort of, it was okay to interview working people. They enjoyed it. Yeah.

BG [01:13:24] So, did you get the idea to incorporate oral history as from working in that original class you took on work and writing, or through just kind of your experiences speaking with people through your thesis?

KB [01:13:39] Mostly through working with Al.

BG [01:13:40] Right.

KB [01:13:42] Because really, with Al, what we were writing was an oral history of Al's working life.

BG [01:13:48] Yeah.

KB [01:13:48] So yeah, I realized what good storytellers, what interesting and important stories these are, how that sort of broadened out. Like these were young people whose whole life was basically home, social life, family and university, or at that point university-college. It broadened their outlook like, 'Oh my gosh, these are the guys who provide our food. They're sitting right down there.' So it was, yeah, I felt good about it. The other thing that tipped me, I'm just remembering now, was there's a wonderful woman in Nanaimo called Thora Howell, who ran the bookstore for years until Chapters came into town. Wonderful independent bookstore. I had been having lunch with Thora, and she had said something. I told her I was going to do a creative writing class, and I think it was actually Laura who said, 'Oh, you should get them to interview some local people.' I thought, what a brilliant idea that was. Then I contacted the archivist in Nanaimo and said, 'You know, we're going to have all these tapes of people who are passing.' So, those interviews and the Harmac ones are in the Nanaimo Archive. I'm really proud that they're there.

BG [01:15:13] That's great.

KB#2 [01:15:14] Do you ever run into Peter Chapman? Know that name?

KB [01:15:19] No. Who is he?

KB#2 [01:15:20] He did a number of --

BG [01:15:21] Oral history, kind of, style interviews with working people.

KB#2 [01:15:26] He works for Share, the Shareholders -- can't remember the acronym names now, but he's.

KB [01:15:34] In Nanaimo?

KB#2 [01:15:35] No. He's here in Vancouver.

KB [01:15:38] Oh.

KB#2 [01:15:41] At the BC Fed he participates with most of the unions on pension training and delivers it out at the winter school.

KB [01:15:51] Well he'd be long after my time now, Ken.

KB#2 [01:15:54] It was '73, is when he was doing his tapes. '73 - '77, and did a lot of labour.

KB [01:16:00] Then he was before my time, or right at that turning point?

BG [01:16:06] So, what prompted you to share your second collection of poetry related to your experiences in construction? That was Turning Left to the Ladies that came out in 2009. That was more recent.

KB [01:16:19] Well, it was actually very related. In between, I had written poetry books about Emily Carr, Georgia O'Keefe, Glenn Gould. Don't ask me how I got into the artists, but I did. I had written some non-fiction essays. I had written a memoir about being a carpenter journeywoman, and my publisher. Oh, actually, my second book of construction poems is called Turning Left to the Ladies.

BG [01:16:50] Yeah.

KB [01:16:51] Yeah, was that what you said? Turning Left? Oh, sorry, okay. I think it was just because I had poems. The whole time I was working, I was writing, you know, my journal turned into poetry. I would just start writing. After, I just went straight for poetry, writing poetry, and I think it just was that I had extra poems.

BG [01:17:11] That hadn't been published as part of the first collection.

KB [01:17:14] Yeah, that hadn't been published. It was around the time, my publisher had been a Victoria publisher, Polestar, who had sold the press to Raincoast. So, there was a big change happening. Raincoast eventually didn't want any poets because they weren't making enough money. Surprise, surprise. They didn't know that before. So, I was sort of stuck. I had two manuscripts, the Glenn Gould manuscript and then I had these carpentry poems. Amazingly, I got two phone calls from two different publishers saying, 'Do you have any manuscripts?' I mean, that's like a writer's dream.

KB#2 [01:17:55] Yes.

KB [01:17:55] Unbelievable. So I gave the construction poems to the one from Ontario who had phoned first, Palimpsest Press, and the others I gave to a local press, Caitlin Press, the Glenn Gould poems. After I published my memoir, sorry for this long story, she said to me, 'Do you have any more?' She said, 'Why don't we reprint Covering Rough Ground? So you have a book of poems to go with your memoir from the same publisher?' And so she decided, I said, 'You know what? Some of those poems I don't like any more, I have other poems.' So, it turned into a new edition and that became Rough Ground Revisited. Its a long story.

KB#2 [01:18:40] No, that's life, it is a long story.

BG [01:18:44] So, why do you think it's important that we capture stories of labour and working people, whether through oral history or poetry?

KB [01:18:52] Yeah. Yeah, I think I talked about that before too. It gives us pride and gives us confidence, gives us respect, self-respect. I think those kind of things, I think also are very good organizing tools.

KB#2 [01:19:14] Yes.

KB [01:19:14] You know, journals like Our Times that people see that, oh, my God, I don't have to be treated this way. It was like the first time we ever heard the word sexual harassment was from the BC Federation of Labour, Astrid Davidson on the Women's Committee said, 'We're going to have a conference on this new thing called sexual harassment.' We all went, 'What's that?' You know, we were women in trades, we should. You know, we knew what it was, but no one had said the word. We actually, guys -- a lot of guys gave us a hard time, like, you know, what? It was about, like, no sense of humour. It's just a joke. Why are you taking this so seriously? We were a little embarrassed, but we went, and as I remember, we laughed for two days out of relief. Like, 'Oh, that's what's been going on. That.' But we had to say it, and hear it from other women, and talk about it before we -- I mean of course your gut, you recognize it. So, I think that's what labour history and labour music and labour art does, is that your gut recognizes, 'Yes, that's right. I have a right to think that. I have a right to feel that.' It's like women now, starting to finally speak up about the casual harassment that goes on all the time. We need to say that out loud. We need to see how bad it is publicly, it's like the health and safety stuff. People don't know and don't feel they have a right to object or to ask for better treatment until, I think, they talk to each other or they see it honoured in some way. So, I think it's really important.

KB#2 [01:20:53] Yeah, I think a lot of that stuff came out of the '50s where that our dads came out of the War era and the deal was they were military trained, so only needed that much information. You don't need any more. Move on.

KB [01:21:10] And don't talk about it.

KB#2 [01:21:11] Don't talk about it, and I grew up in East Vancouver in the veterans project, and there was all sorts of abuse, and alcohol abuse, and physical and emotional abuse there, out of the war. The way that those guys processed that was to stomp down and say nothing.

KB [01:21:29] Say nothing.

KB#2 [01:21:29] Have maybe one word to complete that. That was it, and that's how we grew up. Then when the '60s came along, and the cultural revolution happened, where you could say pretty near anything.

KB [01:21:39] It was all about talking.

KB#2 [01:21:41] Yes, and understand.

KB [01:21:42] That was the women's movement. It was like, we were talking to each other, and the guys were right. It's dangerous, because when people talk to each other, they get ideas. Yeah, yeah. Al talked about that as well. Guys coming back from the war. He said, 'There was a lot of drinking, a lot of abuse, and that's how you dealt with it.' Today we say

PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and mental illness, and we address it as an illness; but in those days, yeah. It was just, shut up. It's not manly to talk about it. It's weak.

KB#2 [01:22:14] Yes.

KB [01:22:15] It was considered weak. One of the things I must say I've learned -- this is not on the question list, it's from Women in Trades group -- is women have gone through a lot of changes, but I don't think we're going to get much further without the help of men. Like, women are not the problem, and I've seen that in the trades. We've worked 40 years out, full-out to get women. We trained women, we prepared women. We see women that are keen. They can do the job. They're really good at what they do. 3%. That number of 3% has not changed in forty years of working with women in trades, and I think I'm not the only one, several of us have started thinking this is a management problem. If you want to have the other 50% of the workforce working for you, and doing some damn fine work, then you're going to have to have leadership that says you have to treat people fairly. If one guy's harassing you, everyone knows who the guy is. He's usually just an asshole, and the guys don't like him either. So, what they have been doing is firing the women. Get rid of the problem.

KB#2 [01:23:23] Yes.

KB [01:23:23] The problem isn't the woman. So, I think we're at -- in some ways, it's taking longer than I thought, but there is a slight movement over towards seeing that men too, need to change and young men are changing. I worry about them going on the job, on construction and they learn that silence thing. Just to shut up when other people are being harassed, be glad it's not you, but hopefully that's changing and that there's more openness about things that we've been so shamed of, like sexual harassment and ashamed of speaking about. In a way, even the whole Trump election thing has brought a lot of ugliness. Like one of the commentators, an African-American woman was saying last night, we all knew there was racism, but it was sort of underground. Well, now it's out in the open. Let's deal with it.

KB#2 [01:24:20] So, yeah, the real issue there, though, is it's systemic in the male society still. You can see some of the young people now moving more into a deviant or bizarre relationship with partners now, seems to be. When you see Trump in all his outbursts, 50% of the people support the guy. I mean, so we have a whole culture that's still there, based on the white --.

KB [01:24:52] Yeah.

KB#2 [01:24:53] Brexit was basically the same kind of thing.

KB [01:24:55] Yeah. Yeah.

BG [01:24:56] Just to put this in context, on the record, today is actually the day of the American election, and so this is why it's come up in conversation. So this actually will be very, as of tomorrow --

KB [01:25:07] Passe.

BG [01:25:07] As of tomorrow will be an interesting tape to look back on. But what it is, it's all very relevant right now and it's coming back up.

KB [01:25:15] Yeah, and I guess I can say, you know, if there is something good to be said about, it's like, okay, well let's get the problems out into the open.

BG [01:25:23] That's true.

KB [01:25:24] You know, we never could handle sexual harassment until we had a word for it, talked about it, started making union policies about it; but we need more leadership in terms of, okay, what are we going to do about changing?

KB#2 [01:25:38] Yeah, I see that changing, where I was going actually, is bullying.

KB [01:25:42] Yes.

KB#2 [01:25:46] My daughter's a teacher with Amanda Todd's mum.

KB [01:25:51] Oh, my goodness.

KB [01:25:52] She knows about bullying.

KB#2 [01:25:54] Yeah.

KB [01:25:56] That's really what harassment is.

KB#2 [01:25:58] Yes, it is.

KB [01:25:58] The word we use now is bullying. That's what it is. It's -- and I found in construction that, as a woman, is that all I had to do to not be bullied was to talk back. You know, tell the guy to fuck off into his face, and suddenly, he's you're best buddy. Just want to know where the line was, you know? Oh, that's what you wanted. Why didn't you just ask? Yeah.

BG [01:26:24] So, do you think that the hurdles that young women face today entering male-dominated trades or industries, have they changed much since the time that you entered?

KB [01:26:37] No. I'm really sad to say that, but I do. I regularly give speeches, and talks, and I'm on committees and stuff. The issues are the same.

BG [01:26:49] Mhm.

KB [01:26:51] The women, recruitment is not a problem. Women want these jobs, once they sort of -- women are, the good news is, women are starting to think of them on their own. It's not like some guy says, 'Why don't you be an ironworker?' They're starting to see other people, men, do the jobs and they go, 'I'd like that.' You know, the pay is way better than women's traditional work, but the issues are the same and the issues aren't the work. Like I've interviewed a lot of women, tradeswomen across Canada and I never met a woman -- I shouldn't do that, that's a Donald Trump thing -- I never met a woman who couldn't do the work. You know, when you're starting out, you're not very strong. Neither are the guys, and everyone gets stronger, and everyone learns ways. Balance. It's all about balance and leverage, and now we have cranes and all these fancy machines.

KB#2 [01:27:44] Yes.

KB [01:27:44] But it's about dealing with the guys, and that culture that disapproves, and it's about also always being a minority. So, almost always, the women are alone. They're the only one. There's all kinds of research about how that's the most difficult position to put someone in. You know, you're the only First Nations person on this job. You're, automatically, you're a little odd. You're suspect. You're watched all the time. You're judged much more fiercely. So, I'm sorry to say it doesn't seem to have changed. The only -- in a way, it's a good thing that we have trade skill shortages. The pressure is on. We've been saying this for 40 years to the government, you're going to run out of skilled tradespeople. Training programs right now aren't working very well. The apprentices that I see come out of them aren't -- it's, there are apprentices training apprentices, which is unheard of in my day. In my day, at least the union ratio, was 4 to 1. Four joruneypeople to one apprentice. So you were always, had skilled people around you. You'd always say, 'What can I do?' You know, I used to joke with Jack, the first guy that apprenticed me. Whenever anything got at all hard, I called Jack. You know, I'd say, 'I need a trick of the trade.' And he showed me the easy way. He always said, 'There's always an easy way.' But another apprentice isn't going to teach you that. So that -- so we have issues right now, I think, with apprenticeship, but also with women getting into those programs and staying in the program. What's happening is women get in, and then after a year or two of this sort of unusual culture that really doesn't want them, their management not supporting them. Getting rid of them if one of the guys doesn't like them. The women go, 'I don't need this.' And they drop out, and there's a part of me that whenever I talk to young tradeswomen, I talk about the culture all the time because I said, 'I walked into it like a brick wall, and it's really important that you know what to expect. You know, when they say that to you, they're not. When they, you know, they're not.' I mean, even the difference between being pushed to see what your line is and being harassed. There's a line, and it's important you know the difference. All that stuff, but it's slow. It's really been slow. So I -- that's where I think, okay, we need to shift focus to the management here.

BG [01:30:15] So is that what you emphasize in the talks that you do give now to young women in trades, is the culture?

KB [01:30:21] The culture.

BG [01:30:21] Yeah.

KB [01:30:22] Yeah. The way, I mean, some it's very funny. Like the way guys talk in these one-liners, always funny, but a little bit sort of ribbing. Like, get the guy. Very competitive. Yes.

KB#2 [01:30:37] Testosterone poisoning.

KB [01:30:38] Oh, that's right.

KB [01:30:39] We used to, at Women in Trades, we used to do -- one of the things we'd do is have conferences with workshops on one-liners.

BG [01:30:46] Really?

KB [01:30:46] Yeah, there's a woman, Heather Watt, who has sinced married as Heather Tomsic, who was brilliant at one-liners. I used to carry around a little list in my pocket. I

always -- I wasn't a one-liner, like I was really bad at that. In a way, I was so naive it helped me, because I'm sure a lot of this stuff went right over my head. Didn't even hear it, but teaching women that. Also, I mean, the other thing is, I teach them there's great skills you will learn here, including things like not to take it all personally. How to just push through, how to get on with the job, not to whine. I hate women who whine, I hate men who whine. So, you learn great skills. Men and women do.

KB#2 [01:31:31] Is Heather still working for the GVRD (Greater Vancouver Regional District)?

KB [01:31:33] Yes. Yeah.

KB#2 [01:31:35] Do you see her?

KB [01:31:36] I haven't seen her in a long time. We keep talking about all of us old timers, old Women in Trades Women, we actually got together once. CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) -- not Ideas -- the Michael Enright show did a documentary on women in trades and we got together for part of that, but Heather didn't make that meeting, so I haven't seen her in a while. She does a lot of health and safety stuff.

KB#2 [01:32:00] Yes, she's a corporate trainer there.

KB [01:32:02] She's what?

KB#2 [01:32:03] A corporate trainer for GVRD.

KB [01:32:05] She'd be good at that. Yes.

BG [01:32:09] So we're wrapping up towards the end of the interview here. You've received a lot of awards and accolades over the years for your writing and accomplishments. Looking back on your career, what are you the most proud of? Hmm. If you can pick one.

KB [01:32:23] Oy! What I am most proud of. I'm most proud of working for women, that population. So, yeah, I think it's one of the most profound issues in the world. Sexism is everywhere. Discrimination against women is everywhere. We're better off here than almost anywhere else in the world, and it's still not great. We still make less money. We still don't get promoted. We still don't get into the trades, whatever. So, I'm really proud that I've done a lot of work for my sisters, and the work for my sisters is also the work for my brothers.

BG [01:33:13] What was your favourite part of working in the construction industry?

KB [01:33:17] Whew! Well, I think I told you I loved construction for, I loved it for the physicalness of it. You sure don't have to go to the gym after a day of construction. I would go swimming because you don't get that stretch. But I love the physicalness of it. I love. So it was like sort of pitting my body against the world and seeing the product of it, not being against, but working with it. I love working with lumber. I love the material. When tradeswomen would get together, we all gave each other a hard time. Like the ironworkers, working with it, 'Oh, it's so cold. It's so hard.' They'd talk about how wood their wood was.

KB#2 [01:34:07] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KB [01:34:08] But I love the warmth of my material, wood is a very living thing, even when it's cut to me, there's a spirit to wood. And I'm a, you know, like a sledge hammer kind of person. I'm not a fine cabinet maker. But I love, the pay was good. I loved the respect I got as a carpenter. It's an important job. I was very proud to build shelter for people. Yeah. Actually, on the good days, I liked the guys I worked with. Um, they're very modest. Carpenters are really nice people. They're, they know what they do. That's probably true of all trades. But I know carpenters best. They know how important this is. No one can take it away from you that you built that. You know, my son goes, every time we drive downtown, he goes, 'I know, you built that. You built that.' But that feels good. You know, you have, there's something, like, you know, after you go, there's something there, and you were part of that structure, so. Yeah, and as I said, I felt whole. I felt my male part, my female part. Every part of me was engaged in that work. It was, it was profoundly satisfying, on the good days to do that.

BG [01:35:32] So is there anything else from your experience as a worker, academic and poet that you'd like to tell us about?

KB [01:35:39] No, I think that's it.

KB#2 [01:35:42] That's awesome.

BG [01:35:43] Do you have any more questions, Ken?

KB#2 [01:35:45] No, I think I have, yeah. I've seen more of you than I've ever seen. And we've spent, you know, little bits of time together over 15, 25 years. I was at BCIT as well. And I think it's a great summation of where we are in the labour movement, especially on the women's issue. I think it's systemic. I think it will not change until the executives and the superstructure of the unions get there. And that could be one of their things that will cause their demise because young people are going, 'These old dinosaurs that are sitting here with these old ideas', and, you know, hopefully not. All we can really do as individuals is make sure that our kids have the smarts to come ahead and participate in society.

KB [01:36:43] With fairness and justice and equity.

KB#2 [01:36:47] Equity, right down the line.

KB [01:36:48] Yeah. Yeah. I must say, I mean, the negative part. You might want to erase this part later.

BG [01:36:54] It's your choice. Do you want to speak on camera?

KB [01:36:56] Well, maybe it should be there? I don't know. You can erase it, if you think it should go, but, I worked for the union. I started shifting out of the unions towards more writing, more Simon Fraser work and working for myself when there wasn't union work. But there wasn't union work for a long time. This was after Steve Creston left and we had a new dispatcher. Maybe the second. I don't know. We've had a few. And I thought, 'God, I haven't even had a call for a job for a long time'. So I thought I'd go in and say hi to the dispatcher and say, you know, what's the work scene? And I knew within seconds I would never work again, as long as that guy was dispatcher. And a little later, I ran into one of the guys who had been very active with me. He was very dark skinned. I think he's from South Pacific. And he had been very active in the union as well, same time I was. And we ran

into each other in the Makita store, of course. And I said to him, I said, 'Are you working?' That's what you always say, are you working , and I said, 'No, I haven't worked for the union for a long time. How about you?' And he said no, and we just looked at each other. We both knew, with that dispatcher, we would never work again. And then I stopped getting, so even after I stopped working for the union, I kept my membership, I kept paying my dues. I was proud to be a carpenter. And then I stopped getting dues notices, this is a few years back. And at first I thought, maybe its because I'm retired. But anyway, finally one day I phoned the union and I said, you know, I'm not even getting dues notices. 'Is everything still okay?', and she said, 'Well, actually, you know, you're not a member anymore.' But I said, 'Well, I didn't quit.' And she said, 'Well, no.' and I don't know what happened, but they kicked me out of the union. I don't know what happened. So I phoned the dispatcher, I said 'I want to be a member of the union, even though I don't want to work, I just want to be a retired member!' And he said, 'You don't want to be a member of this union.' I said, 'What do you mean?', I said, 'Well, you have like the Christmas parties.' He said 'No, we don't have Christmas parties.' Like there is no, so I said, 'Well, do you have other women?' No, they might have one. But this is like, what, 30 years later? 40 years later? So yeah, that sense of there's no energy. There's no, it's still a White Boys Club.

KB#2 [01:39:31] Well, the other thing that's happened though in the industry is the elimination of union jobs, for sure, when the non-union came in, so that whole residential became non-union. And so the commercial side was really what was left. And so.

KB [01:39:45] And that's gone non-union. yeah. That's right, there's so little work, and I'm glad you said that. There's way, way, way less work. And the beginning of that was when the old manager organized the march like there were like six of us walking in a circle around Pennyfarthing. That was the beginning of the non-union moving in and being recognized by the government and given priority and they went out to wreck the unions and, building trade unions, and they did a shockingly good job. So yeah, the unions are hanging on, but it made me feel sad. I said, 'Can I join?' Anyway.

KB#2 [01:40:29] How tight are they on the parking on the street, here?

KB [01:40:31] They are pretty tight. Oh, could you get an internal place?

BG [01:40:34] We are parked just out front, in the 2 hours in front of the building. Yeah. Yeah. So we should be wrapping up here. It's been just 2 hours. But it's been a wonderful interview. We want to thank you very much for this.

KB [01:40:48] Yeah, if you want to cut the last part.